

THE POETIC PROCESSION

J. F. ROXBURGH

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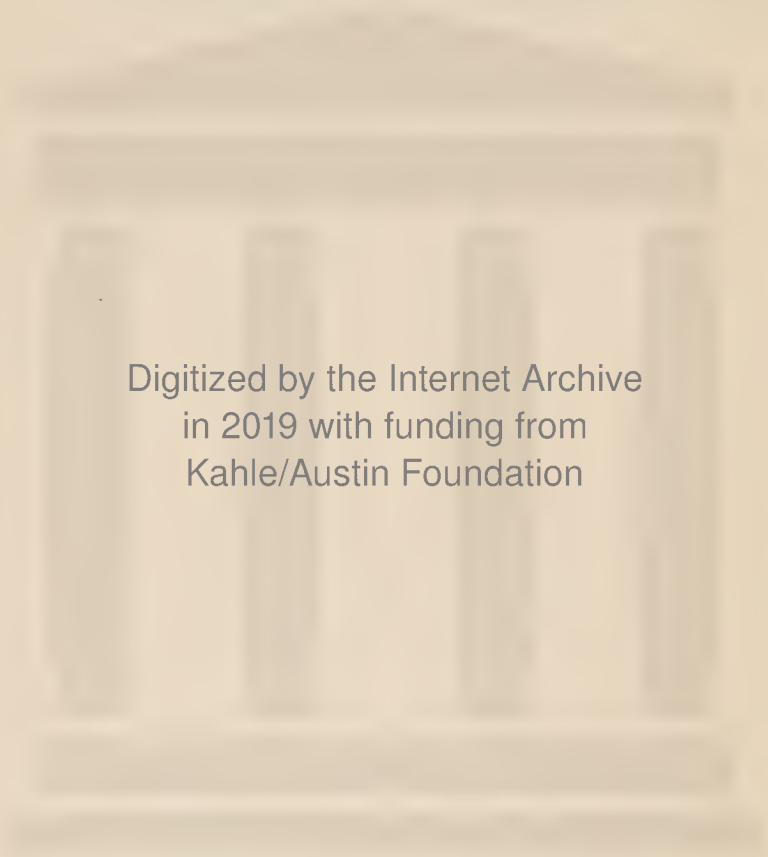


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THE POETIC PROCESSION



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THE POETIC PROCESSION

AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH POETRY

By J. F. ROXBURGH

HEADMASTER OF STOWE SCHOOL



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TO
THE HEAD OF MY HOUSE
W. E. C. C.

87941

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I

THE POETRY OF FANCY

THE POETIC PROCESSION

I. THE POETRY OF FANCY

IF not a procession, at least a succession. For poetry is a live thing, continually changing, and its great moments are best studied in the form of a succession, each marking a change accomplished and provoking a change to come. Yet it is a matter not of moments only but of men, for all the great moments have made great men, and been made by them. So the succession is really a procession—a procession of mighty figures, each at once the creation and the creator of an age. It is with these great men as well as with their ‘ages’ that we are concerned, for what I want to do is to study the changing course of English Poetry through the work of the men who most

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helped to make and most clearly mark its changes.

But first of all what is this thing that we call 'poetry,' and in what sense can it be said to 'change'? I cannot tell you what poetry is, but I can tell you some of the things it does. The poet is a man who feels the same emotions as you and I feel, and sees the same sights, but who feels what he feels more intensely than we do, and sees what he sees more clearly. And, because of this greater sensitiveness of his, he has ideas, too, that we have never had and can grasp truths that we have never reached. But—greatest gift of all—the poet can *express* what he feels and sees and thinks as common men cannot, and by means of his poetry he can convey to us the greater riches of his mind. So what poetry does for us is to give us new ideas, clearer visions, stronger emotions, and also to express as we could not have done for ourselves what we have already thought and seen and felt. We have all, for example, been afraid of the dark, but which of

us could *express* the fear of the dark as Coleridge does?

*Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turn'd round, walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.*

In the days when skirts were long we had all seen the dainty movement of a girl's feet as they are concealed and revealed by the swing of her dress; but I at least had seen it without noticing it, till, as a young boy, I read about it in a poem of Suckling's. Suckling tells of his lady's charms, and about her feet he says:

*Her feet beneath her petticoat
Like little mice stole in and out.*

Surely that is a new vision—and here is another picture which a poet has taught me to see. Do you know how in the evening light

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sometimes the bare trees seem to crane over a pond and stare down on to the black water? Browning says:

*One pond of water gleams;
The trees bend
O'er it, as wild men watch a sleeping girl.**

To have seen it in that way, illumined by a single flash of Browning's genius, is to have enriched one's existence for ever afterwards.

Then, I said, too, that poetry could bring us new ideas. To how many of us did not Henley bring a new idea when we first read *Invictus* in our youth—the idea that a brave man could defy fate itself?

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll;
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.*

* *Pauline*. Quoted in Mr. J. T. Hackett's *Commonplace Book*.

—or Clough, who teaches us the other way of facing calamity, the way of hope not of despair? *Say not the struggle naught availeth*, he says to you; things are better than you think:

*If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers
And, but for you, possess the field.*

*For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.*

Countless ordinary English people have got help from one or both of these poems in the difficult business of living their lives.

But we must get back to our procession, for we have to see how this poetry that we are discussing can be said to 'change.' Well, if you look at the poets as they move in their pro-

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cession before your eyes, you will see that each is dressed after the manner of his age—the Elizabethans in starched ruffs; the men of the eighteenth century in knee-breeches; the men of to-day in Homburg hats. And if you listen to their verses you will hear that each composes, too, after the manner of his age. For there have been fashions in poetry as there have been fashions in dress, and just as you can tell the period of a man in a picture by the kind of dress he wears, so you can tell the period of a poem not only by the name and date of the poet but by the style and flavour of the poetry.

I want to talk about the work of some ten or twelve English poets or groups of poets with just this one end in view—that we may be able to know and love and recognize again the particular poetic fashion which each helped to mould. I can only take those ten or twelve, and I can say very little upon each, but you will, I know, pardon these limitations, for I have to cover some four hundred years of the fullest and richest poetic history in Europe.

I shall begin with the Elizabethans, for they are the first poets that every Englishman can easily read, and I shall only speak of Elizabethan *Song*, because the drama is too big for my canvas and because Spenser stands a little apart and is less typical than the song writers of the best work of the age. Let me read you an Elizabethan song or two, and we will try to disengage the quality in them which seems specially characteristic—the quality by which one learns to recognize a song as Elizabethan.

This one is by Marlowe, the playwright who comes just before Shakespeare. In the poem a shepherd is speaking; he is asking his beloved to come to him and offering to give her all the lovely things that he can think of, if she will consent.

*Come live with me and be my Love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and valleys, dale and field,
And all the craggy mountains yield.*

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*There will we sit upon the rocks
And see the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.*

*There will I make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroider'd all with leaves of myrtle.*

*A gown made of the finest wool,
Which from our pretty lambs we pull,
Fair lined slippers for the cold
With buckles of the purest gold.*

*A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me and be my Love.*

*Thy silver dishes for thy meat
As precious as the gods do eat,
Shall on an ivory table be
Prepared each day for thee and me.*

*The shepherd swains shall dance and sing
 For thy delight each May-morning:
 If these delights thy mind may move,
 Then live with me and be my Love.*

I am sure she did go and live with him. She could hardly help it after all that. Of course if she had been a practical young woman she would have wanted to see those silver dishes and that ivory table before she called it a bargain, but she wasn't any more practical than the shepherd. She had just the quality that the shepherd had and the poet too—she preferred fancy to reality. And I think that all this kind of poetry is best described as the *poetry of fancy*. You will find that much Elizabethan poetry is of this kind, and though I don't really count plays—at any rate not the most serious parts of them—you will find that even the plays are wonderfully adorned with this quality. Read Shakespeare's *Richard II.* if you don't believe me.

Here is another song—Shakespeare's this

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time, for he wrote the best of the Elizabethan songs. Here he is telling you what really happens to a man who has been drowned.

*Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
Hark! now I hear them,—
Ding, dong, bell.*

Surely that is the pure essence of fancy. But there is another thing that I notice about these songs, and that is that they do not need music—though most of them have music, of course. You have only got to read them and they sing themselves to you inside your head. Listen to this:

*It was a lover and his lass
With a hey and a ho, and a hey-nonino!*

*That o'er the green cornfield did pass
 In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
 When birds do sing hey ding a ding ding:
 Sweet lovers love the Spring.*

*Between the acres of the rye
 These pretty country folks would lie:*

*This carol they began that hour,
 How that life was but a flower:*

*And therefore take the present time
 With a hey and a ho, and a hey-nonino!
 For love is crownèd with the prime
 In spring time, the only pretty ring time,
 When birds do sing hey ding a ding ding:
 Sweet lovers love the Spring.*

Here is another, just as songful and perhaps more fanciful. Indeed, I think it is the most perfect specimen of the Elizabethan song there is.

*Take, O take those lips away
 That so sweetly were forsworn,*

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*And those eyes, the break of day,
Lights that do mislead the morn:
But my kisses bring again,
Bring again—
Seals of love, but seal'd in vain,
Seal'd in vain!*

Now the danger of fancy is that it may become fantastic—that is, too elaborate, too complicated. Indeed, it often does so, even with the Elizabethans. Sir Philip Sydney has a famous little poem beginning

My true love hath my heart and I have his

—a situation that might (and does) become very complicated. And fancy is apt also to become entangled with the old classical love-apparatus—for fancy nearly always deals in love—such as Cupid and his darts, which are themselves the creations of old Greek and Roman fancy but which become wearisome to English ears if one gets too much of them. Here is an example of what I mean. It is a

poem by John Lyly—whose prose-writing, by the way, was much too fantastic also. He tries to explain how his lady (whom he oddly names Campaspe) got all her charms. Apparently it was through a series of successful bets with Cupid, which ended in leaving the god ruined and blind—that will explain to you why Love is blind.

*Cupid and my Campaspe play'd
At cards for kisses; Cupid paid:
He stakes his quiver, bow and arrows,
His mother's doves, and team of sparrows;
Loses them too; then down he throws
The coral of his lip, the rose
Growing on 's cheek (but none knows how);
With these, the crystal of his brow,
And then the dimple on his chin;
All these did my Campaspe win:
At last he set her both his eyes—
She won, and Cupid blind did rise.
O Love! has she done this to thee?
What shall, alas! become of me?*

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It is all a little too complicated, isn't it?—
a little too clever. You will see the same thing
later on, when we have left the Elizabethans
behind, for it was their *cleverness* that lasted
on into the next age.

II

THE POETRY OF INGENUITY

II. THE POETRY OF INGENUITY

THAT poem about Campaspe, though it is an early one, helps one to see how the *Poetry of Fancy* which the Elizabethans gave us was able to turn into the *Poetry of Ingenuity* which was the gift of the 'Carolines,' and to show you how the change actually came about, I am going to read a little poem, one of the best known of all English songs, by Ben Jonson, who died about twenty years after Shakespeare.

*The Caroline
Lyrists*

The 'Carolines,' by the way, are of course the poets who wrote in the time of Charles the First, as the Elizabethans are the poets who wrote in the time of Elizabeth. Here is the song:

*Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup
And I'll not look for wine.*

*The thirst that from the soul doth rise
 Doth ask a drink divine;
 But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
 I would not change for thine.*

*I sent thee late a rosy wreath,
 Not so much honouring thee
 As giving it a hope that there
 It could not wither'd be;
 But thou thereon didst only breathe
 And sent'st it back to me;
 Since when it grows, and smells, I swear
 Not of itself but thee!*

Of course it is perfectly delightful and of course it is very much like the Elizabethan songs that I have been reading. But it is just a little different none the less. For one thing it is cleverer, more ingenious than the best of them, and for another it is more serious than any of them. It has not got the gaiety, the frivolity almost, of the Elizabethans. Your Elizabethan has his feelings—he is as much in

love as anyone—but he is not going to let you see them, and he covers them up with playfulness and an assumption of tremendous good spirits. You will find that the Carolines cannot quite do that. They try to, but somehow they can't make the cheerfulness quite convincing. Then they try harder still and become more and more ingenious, but the effect just becomes more and more unnatural and strained. One could not have expected anything else. The Elizabethan courtier is a gay figure in history, and the Elizabethan poet was no doubt for the most part a happy man, but the Cavalier who was loyal to his King is a tragic figure in history, and the Cavalier poet was for the most part a ruined and disappointed man. Sir Richard Lovelace, the greatest of the Carolines perhaps, was wealthy and brilliant and beautiful as a young man, but he gave everything to his cause, and when his cause was lost, he died sick, penniless, and broken-hearted after years of prison. *Of course* he can't carry off the attempt to seem

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gay and careless. Either his poetry tries to be playful and is far too elaborate and clever and quite unsuccessful, or else it simply is not gay at all but very grave and very touching—though naturally it is always ingenious, for that is his style and the style of his age. I will not read you his most elaborate and least successful poems, because they simply are not worth it, but here is the kind of thing he tries to do in them. Gratiana is dancing with masculine admirers all round, and in one verse he says that the floor is

By this one star made firmament

and in another that when she stopped you could see that the same floor was *all paved with broken hearts*. Elsewhere Elinda's glove is described as a farm with 'five tenements' in each of which the poet calls to leave his rent—a kiss. And there is one poem that he actually addresses to the mineral waters at Bath which are about to be drunk by his lady by way of a 'cure.' The waters are congratu-

lated on their unique privilege. That sort of thing is the Caroline ingenuity at its worst. But listen to it at its best. Lovelace says that he cares nothing for prison if he can see his lady through the bars and if he can drink to the health of his unfortunate King.

*When Love with unconfinèd wings
Hovers within my gates,
And my divine Althea brings
To whisper at the grates;
When I lie tangled in her hair
And fetter'd to her eye,
The birds that wanton in the air
Know no such liberty.*

*When flowing cups run swiftly round
With no allaying Thames,
Our careless heads with roses crown'd,
Our hearts with loyal flames;
When thirsty grief in wine we steep,
When healths and draughts go free—
Fishes that tipple in the deep
Know no such liberty.*

*When, like committed linnets, I
 With shriller throat shall sing
 The sweetness, mercy, majesty
 And glories of my King;
 When I shall voice aloud how good
 He is, how great should be,
 Enlargèd winds, that curl the flood,
 Know no such liberty.*

*Stone walls do not a prison make,
 Nor iron bars a cage;
 Minds innocent and quiet take
 That for an hermitage:
 If I have freedom in my love
 And in my soul am free,
 Angels alone, that soar above,
 Enjoy such liberty.*

Here is the 'poetry of ingenuity' indeed, but do not fail to notice that it *is* poetry.

Sir John Suckling, whose story was not unlike that of Lovelace, succeeds rather better in being light-hearted:

Why so pale and wan, fond lover?

Prythee, why so pale?

Will, if looking well can't move her,

Looking ill prevail?

Prythee, why so pale?

Why so dull and mute, young sinner?

Prythee, why so mute?

Will, when speaking well can't win her,

Saying nothing do't?

Prythee, why so mute?

Quit, quit, for shame! this will not move,

This cannot take her;

If of herself she will not love

Nothing can make her:

The devil take her!

And Robert Herrick, who had a peaceful existence as a country parson, has no difficulty in getting a quiet but intense happiness out of life.

For one thing he loves just looking at his

lady's clothes and seeing how they hang about her.

*Whenas in silks my Julia goes
Then, then (methinks) how sweetly flows
That liquefaction of her clothes.*

*Next, when I cast mine eyes and see
That brave vibration each way free;
O how that glittering taketh me!*

But he can be serious too, or at any rate a little serious. Here is a poem with a moral that we met among the Elizabethans, but this time it is enunciated without any *hey-noninos* or *ding a ding dings*.

*Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles to-day,
To-morrow will be dying.*

*The glorious Lamp of Heaven, the Sun,
The higher he's a-getting
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.*

*That age is best which is the first,
 When youth and blood are warmer;
 But being spent, the worse, and worst
 Times, still succeed the former.*

*Then be not coy, but use your time;
 And while ye may, go marry:
 For having lost but once your prime,
 You may for ever tarry.*

Yet I feel I must end the Carolines as I began them, with Lovelace, who is the most characteristic of them, and I think the noblest of them, too. Even now I never read *To Lucasta, On Going to the Wars*, without a new little flicker of emotion. Lovelace tells his lady that there is one call more sacred than the call of love.

*Tell me not, Sweet, I am unkind
 That from the nunnery
 Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind,
 To war and arms I fly.*

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*True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field:
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.*

*Yet this inconstancy is such
As you too shall adore;
I could not love thee, Dear, so much,
Loved I not Honour more.*

III

THE POETRY OF SCHOLARSHIP

III. THE POETRY OF SCHOLARSHIP

THESE men were Cavaliers. The next great name belongs to a Puritan. If Cavalier poets could seem serious after the Elizabethans, what will a Puritan poet seem?

Milton was a very serious person indeed, and he

found life a very serious business.

Milton.

It is true that he was a Puritan not by nature but by conviction, yet his creed showed him none the less a side of life of which the Cavaliers knew nothing. It is amusing to compare some Caroline references to *dress* with what Milton says somewhere in *Il Penseroso*. You remember Herrick on Julia's clothes? Well, here he is again:

*A sweet disorder in the dress
Kindles in clothes a wantonness;
A lawn about the shoulders thrown
Into a fine distraction;*

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*An erring lace, which here and there
Enthralls the crimson stomacher;
A cuff neglectful, and thereby
Ribbands to flow confusedly;
A winning wave, deserving note,
In the tempestuous petticoat;
A careless shoe-string, in whose tie
I see a wild civility;
Do more bewitch me, than when art
Is too precise in every part.*

Now listen to Milton:

*Come, pensive nun, devout and pure,
Sober, steadfast, and demure,
All in a robe of darkest grain
Flowing with majestic train,
And sable stole of cypress lawn
Over thy decent shoulders drawn.*

*Come, but keep thy wonted state,
With even step, and musing gait,
And looks commercing with the skies,
Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes.*

Of course that little contrast proves nothing whatever, but it has always seemed to me to have some value as an illustration, and it serves to remind one how much Milton, though he loved colour, too, as much as any poet, was in a special degree the poet of black and white—at least of light and darkness. We shall see more of that later, but these lines are at any rate characteristic of the man who loved morning and evening rather for the quiet effects of cloud they bring than for the brightness of sunset and sunrise. Both morning and evening are ‘grey’ to Milton—‘still’ and ‘grey.’

*While the still morn went out with sandals
grey,*

he says in *Lycidas*. And in the fourth book of *Paradise Lost* you find the lines

*Now came still evening on, and twilight grey
Had in her sober livery all things clad.*

But this is by the way. It only illustrates what I said, and shows that Milton would still have

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to be reckoned an innovator if he had done nothing but introduce the Puritan strain into poetry. But of course he did uncountably more than that, though it will not be easy to say exactly what it was. One thing, however, is easy enough to grasp. The Elizabethans and the Carolines had been for the most part men of action, busy men at any rate, who wrote poetry in their spare time. They are *part-time* poets, so to speak. Shakespeare himself was an actor and actor-manager; Lovelace and Suckling were soldiers. But Milton is a *whole-time* poet, what is sometimes called a 'dedicated' poet, a man who in youth had consecrated all that remained of his life to poetry. The consecration did not wholly take effect in Milton's case, but that was due to what he could not have foreseen. He made the consecration none the less. Milton (a Cambridge man) was a scholar, a profound and accomplished scholar, and I am going to call his poetry the *Poetry of Scholarship*, because it was through scholarship that he sought to make himself a poet, and

because without scholarship much of his poetry cannot be fully understood. That is why Milton's poetry has a particularly *literary* flavour. One is always conscious that one is reading *literature*, at any rate when one is reading *Paradise Lost*. Certainly the more literary a man is, the more as a rule he likes Milton. The entirely unlearned person does not really appreciate him; there is something remote and exalted about him, and though the splendid music of his blank verse is enough pleasure for some people, his learning does undoubtedly make it harder to follow his thought and has the effect of setting up a barrier between him and the reader.

Milton then sought to make himself a poet through scholarship; and he did so because scholarship opens the door to the world's best literature. Milton did not think that a man could write great poetry till he had filled himself with the greatest thoughts in the world and read all the most beautiful writings in the world. So after his University days Milton

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went on studying. For nine years in his father's home he read and wrote; he read enormously, in five languages at least, and he wrote a little in English and a good deal in Latin. He lived during this time an austere simple life, music being his only relaxation, for he feared the intrusion of luxury or passion into the harmony of his existence and said that to write great poetry a man must first be '*himself a true poem*'—that is, I take it, a thing shapely, harmonious, perfect, owing allegiance to the spirit and not to the flesh. It was during this preparatory time that most of his 'Minor Poems' were written—*L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, *Lycidas*, *Comus*, and others. Let me read you a few lines to show how the poet of scholarship could also be the poet of the common countryside.

In *L'Allegro* he says how he loves the delights of the morning, how he loves

*To hear the lark begin his flight
And singing startle the dull night*

*From his watch-tower in the skies,
Till the dappled dawn doth rise;
Then to come, in spite of sorrow,
And at my window bid good-morrow
Through the sweetbriar, or the vine,
Or the twisted eglantine:
While the cock with lively din
Scatters the rear of darkness thin,
And to the stack, or the barn-door,
Stoutly struts his dames before:
 Oft listening how the hounds and horn
Cheerly rouse the slumbering morn,
From the side of some hoar hill,
Through the high wood echoing shrill.
Sometime walking, not unseen,
By hedge-row elms, on hillocks green,
Right against the eastern gate
Where the great Sun begins his state
Robed in flames and amber light,
The clouds in thousand liveries dight;
While the ploughman, near at hand,
Whistles o'er the furrow'd land,*

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*And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the mower whets his scythe,
And every shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn in the dale.*

In *Lycidas* you can hear the scholar too, but the scholar is a poet all the time.

*Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no
more;*

*For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,
Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor;
So sinks the day-star in the ocean-bed,
And yet anon repairs his drooping head
And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled
ore*

*Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:
So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high
Through the dear might of Him that walk'd
the waves;*

*Where, other groves and other streams along,
With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,
And hears the unexpressive nuptial song
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.*

*There entertain him all the saints above
 In solemn troops, and sweet societies,
 That sing, and, singing, in their glory move,
 And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.*

Would you like to hear the scholar almost drowning the poet's voice? Here is the beginning of the sonnet to Cyriack Skinner, whose grandfather had been a judge:

*Cyriack, whose grandsire, on the royal bench
 Of British Themis, with no mean applause
 Pronounced, and in his volumes taught, our
 laws,
 Which others at their bar so often wrench.*

Milton's preparation at last seemed almost complete. He felt himself ready to begin on the task he had set himself, which was not only to make himself a poet but to write the greatest epic poem in the English language. To perfect his training he went for a short journey to Italy, where the most beautiful poetry of the Europe of that time had been written or

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was still being written. While he was there he went to Naples, and when he was at Naples a ship arrived from England with news that the Civil War had broken out and that the Parliament was in arms against the king. Now Milton was a man who had only two enthusiasms. One was an enthusiasm for beauty—for beauty of sight and sound: that was what made him a poet. The other was an enthusiasm for liberty: that was what made him a Roundhead. When the news came he fought a battle within himself. Which was the more urgent call—the call of poetry or the call of threatened liberty? He decided that liberty mattered more than anything else in the world, more even than poetry, and he went home to serve the Parliament. He served it as a pamphleteer—nowadays he would have been the editor of a party newspaper—and as secretary—he was Latin Secretary for some years to the Commonwealth—and he wrote nothing but prose all the time, rough, bitter, controversial prose for the most

part. For twenty years this 'dedicated poet' wrote practically not a line of poetry. But there was something worse than that, for after a time his eyes began to fail, and he had to choose between his sight and his work. Once more he chose the harder path, and decided to work a little longer, even if it should cost him his sight. It did cost him his sight, and for the last twenty years of his life the 'dedicated poet' was blind. He was ruined, too, before very long, for the Stuarts were restored, and Milton narrowly escaped with his life, to live out his days in obscurity and poverty. *Then* he began on his great work, and in due course *Paradise Lost* was produced and sold to a publisher, it is said, for £5 (later increased to £10). It is not possible to get any true idea of this great poem without reading at least the first two books and three others. The story of the poem does not interest us greatly now; it is based on a dead and gone theology, and though its hero, Satan, is a magnificent figure, one cannot but see the many absurdities of his

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contest with 'omnipotence.' But even the poetry of the poem, which is the most tremendous achievement of the 'grand style' in English, cannot be appreciated through extracts and summaries. I can only read you a few passages which will show to some extent the different flavours that Milton's blank verse can have.

Here is Satan cast from Heaven:

*He trusted to have equalled the Most High,
If he opposed; and, with ambitious aim
Against the throne and monarchy of God,
Raised impious war in Heaven and battle
proud,
With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power
Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal
sky,
With hideous ruin and combustion, down
To bottomless perdition; there to dwell
In adamant chains and penal fire,
Who durst defy the Omnipotent to arms.*

That is like an organ; and here is the same

effect again, helped by the piling up of wonderful musical proper names.

*And all who since, baptiz'd or infidel,
Jousted in Aspramont or Montalban,
Damasco or Morocco or Trebizond,
Or whom Biserta sent from Afric shore
When Charlemain with all his peerage fell
By Fontarabbia.*

Here is Satan again, ready to do battle with Death:

*On the other side,
Incensed with indignation, Satan stood
Unterrified, and like a comet burned,
That fires the length of Ophiuchus huge
In the arctic sky, and from his horrid hair
Shakes pestilence and war. Each at the head
Levelled his deadly aim; their fatal hands
No second stroke intend; and such a frown
Each cast at the other, as when two black
clouds,
With Heaven's artillery fraught, came rattling
on*

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*Over the Caspian, then stand front to front
Hovering a space, till winds the signal blow
To join their dark encounter in mid-air:
So frowned the mighty combatants, that Hell
Grew darker at their frown.*

This is indeed a *scholar's* poetry. 'Comet' means in Greek 'long-haired'—the star with the flowing mane, as it were—and 'horrid' means in Latin (though not in English) 'shaggy,' so that a scholarly 'comet' has very properly got '*horrid hair*.' It often seems that Milton is writing in English and thinking in Latin and Greek.

Here is something in a gentler tone. Satan's angels are passing their time in different occupations, while their captain is away on a great adventure.

*Others more mild,
Retreated in a silent valley, sing
With notes angelical to many a harp
Their own heroic deeds, and hapless fall*

POETRY OF SCHOLARSHIP 45

*By doom of battle; and complain that Fate
Free Virtue should enthrall to Force or
Chance.*

*Their song was partial, but the harmony
(What could it less when Spirits immortal
sing?)*

*Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment
The thronging audience. In discourse more
sweet*

*(For eloquence the soul, song charms the
sense)*

*Others apart sat on a hill retired,
In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high
Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,
Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,
And found no end, in wandering mazes lost:
Of good and evil much they argued then,
Of happiness and final misery,
Passion and apathy, and glory and shame.*

I will end with another Miltonic manner.
You remember how I said that Milton was in
a special degree the poet of light and darkness.

Well, before I quote again from *Paradise Lost*, which he wrote when he was blind, let me read these lines from *Comus*, which was written in his youth, before darkness had become the companion of his life.

A girl is singing in a forest at night. Of the notes of her voice he says:

*How softly do they float upon the wings
Of silence through the empty vaulted night,
At every fall smoothing the raven down
Of darkness till it smiled.*

Set against that this vision of stars and moon. He had been blind for fifteen years when he wrote this:

*Now glowed the firmament
With living sapphires: Hesperus that led
The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon
Rising in clouded majesty, at length
Apparent queen, unveiled her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.*

IV

THE POETRY OF WIT

IV. THE POETRY OF WIT

SO much for the greatest of scholar-poets. When Milton died in 1674, poetry for the time died with him. But scholarship did not die, and for a hundred years the place of the English poets was taken by cultured writers of clever verse, who imitated the Latin poets in English and called their work English poetry. But it was not that, for it lacked the essential spirit of poetry. It lacked vision and it lacked emotion. Instead, it had a new quality, and I think it is best described as *wit*. Wit (which of course is not humour, although it sometimes makes use of it) is really nothing but neatness of speech. It is a quality that appeals not to the feelings but to the intellect; it is concerned as a rule with people, not things; at its best it expresses ordinary ideas in an extraordinarily neat and memorable way. The

poetry to which we are coming now—the poetry of the eighteenth century—I propose to call the *Poetry of Wit*. It did not develop out of the Poetry of Scholarship, but it is a parallel growth with it, being equally the child of the classics. As to its date, it does not reach the highest level till Alexander Pope began to write it, and he was not born till fourteen years after Milton's death. Rather before him Dryden had written, but, though a better man, he was a less perfect poet than Pope. The instrument of the new style is what is called the 'heroic couplet'—ten-syllable lines rhyming in pairs—and it forms an admirable medium for witty speech. Pope announces his subject in a memorable couplet—I said that he was chiefly concerned with *people*:

*Know then thyself; presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is Man.*

Doesn't the rhyme clinch it? And there can be a sting in the rhyme too:

*What can ennoble sots or slaves or cowards?
Alas! not all the blood of all the Howards.*

Here are four lines by Pope on a tomb in Westminster Abbey—could neatness of expression go further?—

*Statesman: yet friend to Truth! of soul sincere,
In action faithful and in honour clear;
Who broke no promise, served no private end,
Who gained no title and who lost no friend.*

That is generous praise, but this style of writing suffers from a defect common to clever men's conversation. It is apt to become cynical or even cruel. Somehow it is easier to say nasty things cleverly than nice things—you remember some of Dr. Johnson's remarks—and Pope is certainly at his best when he is being most unkind. This is what he wrote once of Addison (whom he calls 'Atticus'):

*Were there one whose fires
True genius kindles and fair fame inspires;
Blest with each talent and each art to please,*

*And born to write, converse and live with ease:
Should such a man, too fond to rule alone,
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the
throne, . . .*

*Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
And without sneering teach the rest to sneer;
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,
Just hint a fault and hesitate dislike;
Alike reserved to blame or to commend,
A timorous foe and a suspicious friend;
Dreading even fools, by flatterers besieged,
And so obliging that he ne'er obliged;
Who but must laugh if such a man there be?
Who would not weep if Atticus were he?*

It is only Pope who can do this kind of thing well. Most of his contemporaries and immediate successors are forgotten, but there is a feature of their style which Pope was too skilful to use excessively, but which is characteristic of this age none the less, and which I must mention now because the poetry of the next age had to fight against it for its very life. I mean what is called 'poetic diction,'

that is the habit of artificial expression and the use of unnatural words (some of them taken, like Milton's straight from Latin and Greek) which one would not and could not use in prose. This unnatural poetic vocabulary calls the sun *Phæbus*, lovers and countrymen *swains*, the sea the *main*, a ship a *bark*, and a woman sometimes a *nymph*.

Mr. J. C. Squire has admirably parodied this style in his book, *Tricks of the Trade*. You remember Tennyson's *Break, Break, Break*. I will read you the two middle stanzas.

*O well for the fisherman's boy **
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!
And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still.

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Now this is how Pope would have written that according to Mr. Squire:

*See how the labour of the urgent oar **
Propels the barks and draws them to the shore.
Hark! from the margin of the azure bay
The joyful cries of infants at their play,
(The offspring of a piscatorial swain,
His home the sands, his pasturage the main.)
Yet none of these may soothe the mourning
heart,
Nor fond alleviation's sweets impart;
Nor may the pow'rs of infants that rejoice
Restore the accents of a former voice,
Nor the bright smiles of ocean's nymphs
command
The pleasing contact of a vanished hand.

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V

THE ELEGY

V. THE ELEGY

YOU may see just a trace of this sort of thing in the poem I am going to read next, but you do not find much of it in any great poetry. Indeed the poetry where it is seen at its worst is poetry that we never read;

The Elegy. but it is a monster that had to be slain before progress could be made.

I do not want to leave the 'Eighteenth Century,' the 'Classical' or 'Augustan' age of English poetry—in some ways it was really the winter of English poetry—without mention of the many 'odes' and 'elegies' that have come to us out of it, besides all the work done in the heroic couplet. It is not that very many of them are of high value, for they are not, but there is one among them that is of the highest value. Gray's *Elegy* is classical in form, and it comes to us from the very middle

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of the Classical century; it is full of reminiscences of the ancient Classics too, and the second stanza that I shall read comes almost straight from Lucretius. But it is so full of deep and true emotion that it has been read and loved by all generations of Englishmen and all kinds of Englishmen ever since. If it dates from the winter of English poetry, it surely has the scent of spring about it.

Standing in an English village churchyard, Gray reflects on the tenants of the graves about him, and on what they might have been if born in a less humble sphere:

*Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's
shade,*

*Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering
heap,*

Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,

The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

*For them no more the blazing hearth shall
burn,*

*Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.*

*Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial
fire;
Hands, that the rod of empire might have
sway'd,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre:*

*Some village Hampden, that with dauntless
breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood,
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's
blood.*

*Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life,
They kept the noiseless tenour of their way.*

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*Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the Poor.*

*Nor you, ye Proud, impute to these the fault,
If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,
Where through the long-drawn aisle and
fretted vault
The pealing anthem swells the note of
praise.*

*Can storied urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of
Death?*

*The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour:—
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.*

VI

THE POETRY OF SIMPLE
FEELING

VI. THE POETRY OF SIMPLE FEELING

BUT Gray's *Elegy* is, as I said, exceptional. What is best in it is hardly typical of its age. And in spite of the *Elegy* we have to recognize that during this 'Classical' age poetry had become chilled and formalized, divorced from its natural subjects, enslaved to the intellect and overloaded with 'poetic diction.' A revolution was needed to give it back its liberty, and the revolution came. Like most revolutions, this one, though it seemed to be sudden, had been prepared beforehand by innumerable workers, some famous, but most of them nameless. I will not give you a list even of the famous ones, but I will just mention one, whose work is of surpassing value not only for what it did but for what it was. Poetry had been the preserve hitherto of the

Burns.

cultured classes, and, for the most part, of the cultured classes in London. Robert Burns was a ploughman (not even a successful ploughman), and he came from an Ayrshire village. His work owed little or nothing to the poets who had gone before him, and he did not make war upon the 'classical' tradition—he merely ignored it. He just gave free play to a lyrical gift of astonishing simplicity and sweetness. His power of describing country life and his fiercely democratic sentiments are of importance to the literary historian; but it is his simplest lyrics that are of importance to the unenquiring lover of poetry. I will read you two of the best without comment. The first is *John Anderson*—an extremely sentimental but entirely delightful poem.

*John Anderson my jo, John,
 When we were first acquent,
 Your locks were like the raven,
 Your bonnie brow was brent;*

*But now your brow is beld, John,
 Your locks are like the snow,
 But blessings on your frosty pow,
 John Anderson my jo.*

*John Anderson my jo, John,
 We clamb the hill thegither,
 And mony a canty day, John,
 We've had wi' ane anither;
 Now we maun totter down, John,
 But hand in hand we'll go,
 And sleep thegither at the foot,
 John Anderson my jo.*

What would Pope have said to that? Here is the second, more purely lyrical, and on a higher poetical level altogether.

*O my Luve's like a red, red rose
 That's newly sprung in June:
 O my Luve's like the melodie
 That's sweetly play'd in tune.*

*As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
 So deep in luve am I:*

*And I will luve thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry:*

*Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.*

*And fare thee weel, my only Luve!
And fare thee weel a while!
And I will come again, my Luve,
Tho' it were ten thousand mile.*

But Burns did not make the revolution: he was too remote geographically and linguistically from the huge English middle class that is the maker of literary fortunes because it is the buyer of books and the reader of reviews. The revolution was made in England by two young poets and a bookseller. Two years after Burns' death Wordsworth and Coleridge induced the good bookseller, Cottle, to publish *Lyrical Ballads*. The date is worth remembering and, happily, easy to remember.

The French (political) Revolution occurred in 1789; the English (literary) *Wordsworth.*

Revolution occurred in 1798. The book was written according to a quite definite poetic theory, and Wordsworth contributed a preface which expounded that theory. The two young men had decided that poetry could only be brought back to life by a complete change of subject and a complete change of form. There was to be no more heroic couplet and no more poetic diction; the language of poetry was to be the language of life. And the appeal of poetry, Wordsworth said, was not to be to the intellect but to the heart and the senses. Coleridge added that it might also be to the imagination. The subject of poetry was to be the common surroundings and the simple emotions of ordinary people. Coleridge added that it might also be the creatures of the world of imagination—the weird, the horrible, even the supernatural.

Coleridge and the Poetry of the Eerie. And so the book contained weird poetry by

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Coleridge and simple poetry by Wordsworth.
I will only read you a stanza or two of the
Ancient Mariner to remind you of its peculiar
flavour.

*All in a hot and copper sky
The bloody Sun at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand
No bigger than the moon.*

*Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.*

*The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.*

*I looked upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.*

The many men so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie;
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on: and so did I.

Is not that characteristic of the man who was later on to write *Kubla Khan*?

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which
slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!

But I must get back to Wordsworth. His chosen subject is the outdoor beauty of England and the simple characters that one sees

against the background of English landscape. *Lyrical Ballads* contains his early work but very little of his best, and I shall quote mostly from what he wrote later. Wordsworth did not describe nature merely for itself, but always because of a meaning he saw in it, because of the relation it had to some human being or simply because of the wealth with which it could enrich the memory for grey days later on. He says somewhere that poetry is concerned with *emotion recollected in tranquillity*. For him it is often concerned with *beauty* recollected in tranquillity. Let me read you *The Daffodils*.

*I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils,
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.*

*Continuuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,*

*They stretched in never-ending line
 Along the margin of a bay:
 Ten thousand saw I at a glance
 Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.*

*The waves beside them danced, but they
 Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
 A Poet could not but be gay
 In such a jocund company!
 I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
 What wealth the show to me had brought:*

*For oft, when on my couch I lie
 In vacant or in pensive mood,
 They flash upon that inward eye
 Which is the bliss of solitude;
 And then my heart with pleasure fills,
 And dances with the daffodils.*

And here is nature seen in relation to a human being that is not himself:

*Three years she grew in sun and shower;
 Then Nature said, 'A lovelier flower*

*On earth was never sown:
 This child I to myself will take;
 She shall be mine, and I will make
 A lady of my own.*

*'The floating clouds their state shall lend
 To her; for her the willow bend;
 Nor shall she fail to see
 E'en in the motions of the storm
 Grace that shall mould the maiden's form
 By silent sympathy.*

*'The stars of midnight shall be dear
 To her; and she shall lean her ear
 In many a secret place
 Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
 And beauty born of murmuring sound
 Shall pass into her face.'*

A love of Wordsworth only comes by patient reading and long companionship. Another man's selections cannot help much, but I will give you one more none the less. To illustrate his way of seeing a meaning in

nature, let me read a few stanzas from the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, in which he says that the power of seeing the glory that is behind the world fades away as one leaves childhood behind.

*There was a time when meadow, grove and
stream,*

The earth, and every common sight,

To me did seem

Apparell'd in celestial light,

The glory and the freshness of a dream.

It is not now as it hath been of yore;—

Turn whereso'er I may,

By night or day,

*The things which I have seen I now can see
no more.*

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,

Hath had elsewhere its setting,

And cometh from afar;

Not in entire forgetfulness,

And not in utter nakedness,

*But trailing elouds of glory do we come
 From God, Who is our home:
 Heaven lies about us in our infaney.*

*Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing Boy,
 But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
 He sees it in his joy;
 The Youth, who daily farther from the east
 Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
 And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended;
 At length the Man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day.*

*O joy! that in our embers
 Is something that doth live,
 That Nature yet remembers
 What was so fugitive!
 The thought of our past years in me doth
 breed
 Perpetual benediction: not indeed
 For that which is most worthy to be blest,*

*Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his
breast:—*

*Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings,
Blank misgivings of a creature
Moving about in worlds not realized;
High instincts, before which our mortal
nature*

*Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to
make*

*Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,*

*To perish never;
 Which neither listlessness, nor mad
 endeavour,
 Nor man, nor boy,
 Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
 Can utterly abolish or destroy!*
*Hence in a season of calm weather
 Though inland far we be,
 Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
 Which brought us hither;
 Can in a moment travel thither—
 And see the children sport upon the shore,
 And hear the mighty waters rolling
 evermore.*

That is Wordsworth at his most profound and perhaps at his most beautiful. But it is by his return to simplicity that he most influenced the history of poetry, and I shall not be wrong if, to describe the stage we have now reached, I speak of Wordsworth and the *Poetry of Simple Feeling*. Here is a little poem which illustrates his simplicity so well

that it is almost impossible to read it aloud without spoiling it. Yet I think it is as nearly perfect as poetry in the Wordsworth key can be.

*She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove;
A maid whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love;*

*A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye!
—Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.*

*She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and O!
The difference to me!*

VII

THE POETRY OF ROMANCE

VII. THE POETRY OF ROMANCE

NATURALLY Wordsworth's simplicity is not always successful. A poem such as *Lucy* can only be produced at the cost of many failures. That matters very little. But of course even the true Wordsworth, the characteristic Wordsworth, has limitations. No one poetic style can have the merits of all the poetic styles—that is obvious. Wordsworth's poetry is reflective poetry, and one need not therefore look in it for the fire that belongs to passionate poetry. With Wordsworth one lives continually on the highest levels; yet human life is lived on many levels, and there is room in poetry for a touch of the world and the flesh. Do not let me seem to be depreciating Wordsworth—one of the men who have helped most to spiritualize human life—if I say, in order to distinguish him from some of

his successors, that with Wordsworth *it is always Sunday*. With Byron it is *never Sunday*. Of course, that preposterous nobleman has no sort of claim to be compared with Wordsworth; only he does supply something which Wordsworth did not supply. When Byron was at Trinity, Cambridge, it is said that he bought a large black bear, *Byron.* dressed it in cap and gown and introduced it to the Dean. That is nothing to be specially proud of, I grant you, but Wordsworth could never have done it. Byron gave us back a little of the 'old Adam.' Indeed, being himself of a theatrical habit of mind and a rhetorical habit of speech, yet (in spite of many absurdities) not without a touch of true poetic vision, what he really gave us back was *Romance*. That is why he is much thought of abroad—for the foreigner, who cannot understand our greatest poetry, thinks it tame, but the sound and colour of Byron anyone can appreciate.

I will only read you two passages of Byron.

*She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies,
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes,
Thus mellow'd to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.*

Then, you remember how Byron's one unselfish enthusiasm was for the cause of Greece, at that time trying to free itself from the Turk, and how he died of fever on his way to fight for that cause. He was theatrical about that, as about everything, but he did not make an ignoble end. Here are some lines which express his feeling in the matter:

*The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece,
Where burning Sappho loved and sung,
Where grew the arts of war and peace,
Where Delos rose and Phoebus sprung!*

*Eternal summer gilds them yet,
But all except their sun is set.*

*The mountains look on Marathon,
And Marathon looks on the sea;
And musing there an hour along,
I dreamed that Greece might still be free;
For standing on the Persians' grave
I could not deem myself a slave.*

*Fill high the bowl with Samian wine!
Our virgins dance beneath the shade—
I see their glorious black eyes shine;
But, gazing on each glowing maid,
My own the burning tear-drop laves
To think such breasts must suckle slaves.*

*Place me on Sunium's marbled steep
Where nothing, save the waves and I,
May hear our mutual murmurs sweep;
There, swan-like, let me sing and die:
A land of slaves shall ne'er be mine—
Dash down yon cup of Samian wine!*

Of course it is all a little noisy and crude. But there is something new in it none the less; it adds something that we had been waiting for.

VIII

THE POETRY OF IMAGINATION

VIII. THE POETRY OF IMAGINATION

PERHAPS I have spent too long upon Byron and the *Poetry of Romance*, for romance is an essential ingredient also in the work of Keats, but there is so much more than romance in Keats that I want to speak of him from a different point of view, *Keats and Shelley.* and Byron's contribution cannot be ignored. In this wonderful age that we are dealing with now—the first years of the nineteenth century, in which Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, and Shelley were all writing together—there was no poetry written that is in my opinion (though, of course, all such judgments must be personal) so absolutely *poetry*, so absolutely a thing of creation, as the best poetry of Keats and Shelley. I speak of them together because we all habitually do so; because there is an obvious likeness

between the stories of two men who died within two years of each other, both in Italy and both young; because Keats is the subject of Shelley's musical and noble dirge *Adonais*; and above all because, different as they were, the secret of their power was the same. The poetry of Keats and Shelley is, as no other poetry has been before or since, the *Poetry of Imagination*. I know, of course, that they worked in different ways and for different ends—that Keats is the lover of beauty pure and simple, and Shelley the passionate reformer, the lover of humanity and of liberty—but what we are concerned with is the poetry that they have actually left behind them, and what makes that poetry great is in both cases sheer power of imagination. Imagination in poetry, I take it, is that which creates, that which makes something out of nothing. Keats re-made for himself the glories of Greek art out of no more than an old Classical Dictionary, and the result was *Lamia* and *The Grecian*

Urn; he made that incredible poem *La Belle Dame sans Merci* out of nothing at all.

*'O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.*

*'O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard and so woebegone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.*

*'I see a lily on thy brow
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.*

*'I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a fairy's child;
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.*

*'I made a garland for her head,
 And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
 She look'd at me as she did love,
 And made sweet moan.*

*'I set her on my pacing steed
 And nothing else saw all day long,
 For sidelong would she bend, and sing
 A fairy's song.*

*'She found me roots of relish sweet,
 And honey wild and manna-dew,
 And sure in language strange she said,
 "I love thee true."*

*'She took me to her elfin grot,
 And there she wept, and sigh'd full sore,
 And there I shut her wild wild eyes
 With kisses four.*

*'And there she lull'd me asleep,
 And there I dream'd—ah! woe betide!
 The latest dream I ever dream'd
 On the cold hill side.*

*'I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried—"La belle Dame sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!"*

*'I saw their starved lips in the gloam
With horrid warning gapèd wide,
And I awoke and found me here
On the cold hill's side.*

*'And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake
And no birds sing.'*

I could not tell you what that poem means. I only know that it means more to me every time I read it. Here is surely the 'imagination' that creates, not the 'fancy' that adorns or the 'feeling' that interprets.

In the greatest poem that he ever wrote (a personal judgment again, of course) Keats, sitting in a Hampstead garden, creates for

himself a moon-lit forest, fragrant with every flower and haunted by voices and memories and passions. And the language in which he tells of it is as imaginative as the creative act which summons it into being—imaginative because of the vision that is implicit in it and because of the strange feats that it makes English words perform. Here is a vision of a goblet of red wine, seen in a flash as you drink it down:

*O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stainèd mouth.*

And there you see, too, the feats which he makes words perform; his beaker is not full of wine but of *the warm South*, and in the line before he says that it tastes of the green country where the grapes grew, of the song of the men who trod them and of their *sun-burnt mirth*. I remember trying to translate

and expound that poem to a clever Frenchman who knew no English. He could make nothing of it at all. How can wine taste of mirth, he said, and how can mirth be sunburnt? I am sure I can see no difficulty. Perhaps you have to be a countryman of Keats to understand Keats. I expect that is the truth of the matter.

Before I read the poem—or part of it—let me say what seems to me to be the difference between this ‘imagination’ of which we are speaking now and the ‘fancy’ or the ‘feeling’ of which we spoke before. I think it must be this—that the form of beauty it produces is somehow *infinite*. The sentiment and the vision in Wordsworth’s poem on the *Daffodils* are delightful indeed, but one can reach to the end of them; one can see them each as a whole; they are in the proper sense *comprehensible*. One of Lovelace’s ingenious *concetti* is of course of still more limited power. But Keats creates a vision of a whole mysterious and unbounded world which one never fully explores,

in words which haunt one for ever and seem to have new meanings and new depths every time they come to the mind. He does really seem to put one in touch with the infinite, but that is an effect which one can more easily feel than explain or describe. You feel it more in this *Nightingale* ode than elsewhere, I think. The voice of the nightingale, he says, has caught the ear and stirred the soul of kings and common men since the world began; every tender heart in history has been moved by it; Ruth in her lonely exile heard it and thought of the nightingales at home; princesses imprisoned in sea-girt castles have found in it solace for their love-laden hearts. For them all that deathless voice has opened a window upon fairy-land, and shown them all the kingdoms of that magic world and the glory of them.

*O for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delvèd earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,*

*Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt
mirth!*

*O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stainèd mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world
unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest
dim:*

*Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes
blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding
mossy ways.*

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*I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon the
 boughs,
 But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
 Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
 And mid-May's eldest child
 The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer
 eves.*

*Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
 No hungry generations tread thee down;
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard
 In ancient days by emperor and clown:
 Perhaps the selfsame song that found a path
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick
 for home,
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
 The same that oft-times hath*

*Charm'd magic casements, opening on the
foam*

Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Was I wrong in saying that there is no poetry that is so absolutely *poetry* as this?

Shelley's poetic gift was, I think, no less than Keats', but he was not, as Keats was, a poet and nothing else. The greater vigour of his nature begot in him a passion for reform and a habit of rebellion which are the inspiration of his longer poems (*Prometheus*, for instance, and *The Revolt of Islam* and *Queen Mab*), as they were of the pamphlet on atheism which got him sent down from Oxford. But the pure poet is best seen in his lyrics, wherein with a musical loveliness that I do not think has ever been surpassed in English, he gives utterance to an imagination which not only creates what does not exist, but has the strange power of transmuting what exists already into something else. First of all his musicalness: was there ever such perfectly melodious verse

as this—the poem called *Lines to an Indian Air?*

*I arise from dreams of thee
 In the first sweet sleep of night,
 When the winds are breathing low
 And the stars are shining bright:
 I arise from dreams of thee,
 And a spirit in my feet
 Has led me—who knows how?
 To thy chamber-window, sweet!*

*The wandering airs they faint
 On the dark, the silent stream—
 The champak odours fail
 Like sweet thoughts in a dream;
 The nightingale's complaint
 It dies upon her heart,
 As I must die on thine,
 O belovèd as thou art!*

*O lift me from the grass!
 I die, I faint, I fail!*

*Let thy love in kisses rain
 On my lips and eyelids pale.
 My cheek is cold and white, alas!
 My heart beats loud and fast;
 O! press it close to thine again
 Where it will break at last.*

You will find an almost equal sweetness of sound in the poem called *To the Night*, which will also serve to illustrate the imaginative power that I was speaking of just now, the power of transmuting reality. Night to you and me (though of course it stirs one's imagination at times) is a physical thing, the absence of light or the presence of darkness. But to Shelley Night is a spirit, which strides from East to West across the world, wrapped in a great grey mantle spangled with golden stars. All day long this spirit rests in its dim Eastern cave and plans the dreams that it will bring to men, and when evening comes it meets the spirit of Day and kisses her to sleep. Shelley prays that Night will hasten her approach.

*Swiftly walk over the western wave,
 Spirit of Night!
 Out of the misty eastern cave,
 Where, all the long and lone daylight,
 Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear
 Which make thee terrible and dear,—
 Swift be thy flight!*

*Wrap thy form in a mantle grey
 Star-inwrought!
 Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day,
 Kiss her until she be wearied out,
 Then wander o'er city, and sea, and land,
 Touching all with thine opiate wand—
 Come, long-sought!*

*When I arose and saw the dawn,
 I sigh'd for thee:
 When light rode high, and the dew was gone,
 And noon lay heavy on flower and tree,
 And the weary Day turn'd to his rest,
 Lingering like an unloved guest,
 I sigh'd for thee.*

Thy brother Death came, and cried

‘Wouldst thou me?’

Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed,

Murmur’d like a noontide bee,

‘Shall I nestle near thy side?’

Wouldst thou me’—And I replied,

‘No, not thee!’

Death will come when thou art dead,

Soon, too soon—

Sleep will come when thou art fled;

Of neither would I ask the boon

I ask of thee, beloved Night—

Swift be thine approaching flight,

Come soon, soon!

There is another poem which seems to me to illustrate the transmuting power of Shelley even more strangely. I will read a few lines from the *Ode to the West Wind*.

*O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's
being,*

*Thou, from whose unseen presence the
leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter
fleeing,*

*Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed*

*The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow*

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth.

Now if any other poet had been describing an enchanter chivying ghosts, it would have been natural for him to liken the fleeting spirits to leaves blowing in the wind, making what is unfamiliar easy to grasp by comparing it with what is familiar; but Shelley, having to describe what is familiar, likens it to some-

thing unfamiliar—to something remote and strange and unexpected. And so great is his power that he transmutes the familiar into the unfamiliar; we look at the leaves and see the ghosts. In the next stanza the method of comparison seems at first sight to be reversed. On the approach of a storm the clouds tossing *mid the steep sky's commotion* are compared with leaves—the bigger thing with the smaller thing. But if you look again you see that the leaves are not ordinary leaves. In the confusion of the storm, the sky and the sea seem intertwined like the branches of a mighty forest, and these leaves are the leaves *Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean*. Immediately afterwards the ragged edge of the storm-cloud is changed to human hair, but again it is not ordinary human hair; it is the hair of a wild Maenad maiden who followed the god of ecstasy when the world was young, her hair blown by her fierce running back from her white forehead.

*Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's
commotion,*

*Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves
are shed,*

*Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven
and Ocean,*

*Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head*

*Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim
verge*

*Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou
dirge*

*Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might
Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail, will burst: oh,
hear!*

I wonder if that could have been written if Coleridge had not written the *Ancient Mariner*? I do not feel sure that it could. At any rate if in *Lyrical Ballads* Coleridge readmitted English poetry to the world of the weird and the supernatural, Wordsworth even more certainly readmitted it to the world of natural beauty, and without *Lyrical Ballads* Shelley could hardly, I think, have written *The Sky-Lark* and *The Invitation*. In these he appears as a simpler poet than the poet of *Night* and the *West Wind*, but as no less a master in the simpler strain. To show you this side of Shelley—the side on which you can see him related to all the poets who have loved the English countryside—let me read the last stanza of *The Invitation*.

*Radiant Sister of the Day,
 Awake! arise! and come away!
 To the wild woods and the plains,
 And the pools where winter rains*

*Image all their roof of leaves,
Where the pine its garland weaves
Of sapless green and ivy dun
Round stems that never kiss the sun;
Where the lawns and pastures be
And the sandhills of the sea;
Where the melting hoar-frost wets
The daisy-star that never sets,
And wind-flowers and violets,
Which yet join not scent to hue,
Crown the pale year weak and new;
When the night is left behind
In the deep east, dim and blind,
And the blue noon is over us,
And the multitudinous
Billows murmur at our feet,
Where the earth and ocean meet,
And all things seem only one
In the universal sun.*

IX

THE POETRY OF PICTURE-
MAKING

IX. THE POETRY OF PICTURE- MAKING

IN all the poetry of the Nineteenth Century the beauty of the English countryside plays a leading part. Wordsworth (who had found Poetry shut into a stuffy room and had unlocked the garden door for her) delighted in the beautiful things of nature *reflectively*, and just a little austere-ly, as a philosopher would. On Keats and Shelley beauty acted like wine; it made Keats dream dreams and Shelley see visions. Tennyson is different from them all. He takes the countryside at its face-value, as most middle-class Englishmen do, though he enjoys it intensely. He has not the reverence for Nature, nor indeed the austerity, of Wordsworth; he has not one-tenth of the emotional depth or the imaginative

range of Keats and Shelley; he loves beauty just for itself, just for its effects upon his senses. To Wordsworth beauty is a spiritual thing; to Tennyson it is a physical thing. The purpose of his poetry is aesthetic. The word 'sensuous' might be applied to it if it were not so habitually applied to Keats, though indeed there is an outdoor flavour about much of Tennyson which forbids the epithet. But none the less, nature is to Tennyson a physically beautiful thing, and the poetry in which he describes it is a physically beautiful thing too. You do not go to Tennyson for profound reflection or to be carried into a new world on the wings of imagination. You go to him to see lovely pictures of lovely things, for no poet ever studied nature so closely or knew so well how to reproduce the beauties that he found in her. No doubt there are other things on which Tennyson himself would have based his claim to immortality, and he was of course a skilled inter-

preter of the thought of his age and class. But we do not value even Shelley now as much as he thought we would for his political philosophy—his fierce philosophy of liberty—and still less can we value Tennyson for his tame philosophy of Liberalism. Tennyson as a poet is inspired if you will, but as a prophet he finds no higher theme than the League of Nations, the advance of Science, and the desirability of cautious political and religious reform. There is, indeed, one thing for which Tennyson is, I think, entitled to claim our gratitude besides the power of picture-making that I have spoken of, but first let me show you some of the pictures that he made.

Here is a land of hills and cliffs all laced with streams, seen by the Lotos-Eaters from the sea:

*And like a downward smoke, the slender
stream
Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did
seem.*

*A land of streams! some, like a downward
 smoke,
 Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go;
 And some through wavering lights and shadows broke,
 Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.
 They saw the gleaming river seaward flow
 From the inner land: far off, three mountain-tops,
 Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,
 Stood sunset-flushed: and, dewed with showery drops,
 Up-clomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.*

And here are two of the pictures in the *Palace of Art*—descriptions of real pictures this time. The pictures show different kinds of landscape:

*One show'd an iron coast and angry waves.
 You seem'd to hear them climb and fall
 And roar rock-thwarted under bellowing caves,
 Beneath the windy wall.*

*And one, a full-fed river winding slow
 By herds upon an endless plain,
 The ragged rims of thunder brooding low,
 With shadow-streaks of rain.*

Oenone, too, contains some gorgeous word-painting. Here is the background:

*There lies a vale in Ida, lovelier
 Than all the valleys of Ionian hills.
 The swimming vapour slopes athwart the glen
 And loiters, slowly drawn. On either hand
 The lawns and meadow-ledges midway down
 Hang rich in flowers, and far below them roars
 The long brook falling thro' the clov'n ravine
 In cataract after cataract to the sea.
 Behind the valley topmost Gargarus
 Stands up and takes the morning; but in front
 The gorges, opening wide apart, reveal
 Troas and Ilion's column'd citadel,
 The crown of Troas.*

And here step in the goddesses.

*Then to the bower they came,
 Naked they came to that smooth-swarded
 bower,
 And at their feet the crocus brake like fire,
 Violet, amaracus, and asphodel,
 Lotus and lilies.*

This is all perhaps *mere* description, but Tennyson can give a meaning, too, to the beauty he describes. Here are the thoughts of the lover in *Maud* waiting alone in the garden for his beloved:

*There has fallen a splendid tear
 From the passion-flower at the gate.
 She is coming, my dove, my dear;
 She is coming, my life, my fate;
 The red rose cries, 'She is near, she is near';
 And the white rose weeps, 'She is late';
 The larkspur listens, 'I hear, I hear';
 And the lily whispers, 'I wait.'*

*She is coming, my own, my sweet;
 Were it ever so airy a tread,*

*My heart would hear her and beat,
 Were it earth in an earthy bed;
 My dust would hear her and beat,
 Had I lain for a century dead;
 Would start and tremble under her feet,
 And blossom in purple and red.*

But we all have our own favourites among Tennyson's pictures, and I will only inflict one favourite more of mine upon you. It is his picture of the eagle, first poised on a crag above the sea, then swooping down on a victim below.

*He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
 Close to the sun in lonely lands,
 Ring'd by the azure world, he stands.*

*The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
 He watches from his mountain walls,
 And like a thunderbolt he falls.*

But there is another thing which Tennyson

did, and this is that other claim on our gratitude of which I spoke before. He invented (or re-invented, for Wordsworth had done something not far different), a type of poem which he called the 'English Idyll'—a simple modern story told from the middle-class point of view and framed in English scenery. It is true that some of these idylls are not a success (because in his desire to be simple Tennyson occasionally says in verse what was not worth saying in prose), but as a whole they do undoubtedly contain the germs of a new poetry, the poetry which deals with daily life and its undignified details and yet does not cease to be poetry. In such poetry there is also a place for humour, and, indeed, if it is without humour it is generally unsuccessful.

Here are two extracts which will show you what I mean:

*There on a slope of orchard, Francis laid
A damask napkin wrought with horse and
hound,*

*Brought out a dusky loaf that smelt of home,
And, half cut down, a pasty costly-made,
Where quail and pigeon, lark and leveret lay,
Like fossils of the rock, with golden yolks
Imbedded and injellied.*

I have always liked that pie.

And here is an interrupted lovers' meeting.
The lady's people had made their money in
cotton and they kept pet dogs; the young man
had never made any money at all and he did
not like pet dogs.

*. . . and while we stood like fools
Embracing, all at once a score of pugs
And poodles yell'd within, and out they came,
Trustees and Aunts and Uncles. 'What, with
him!
Go' (shrill'd the cotton-spinning chorus);
'Him!
Girl, get you in!' She went—and in one
month
They wedded her to sixty thousand pounds,*

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*To lands in Kent and messuages in York,
And slight Sir Robert with his watery smile
And educated whisker.*

The Gardener's Daughter and *The May Queen* are others—much less good, I think—of the same kind.

X

THE POETRY OF HUMAN
CHARACTER

X. THE POETRY OF HUMAN CHARACTER

MOST of these 'Idylls' are also, in fact, 'Dramatic Monologues' — soliloquies by the person who is chiefly concerned with the incidents of the story. The Dramatic Monologue is of course the chosen poetic form of Browning, and if you will read Tennyson's *St. Simeon Stylites*, you will see that at one point at least these two utterly different poets overlap. But at that point Browning is incomparably the greater.

After one has listened to the other great poets of the century, Browning's voice sounds strange at first. Partly this is because he is more inclined to shout at you with his voice than to sing to you with it, and partly because he shouts or sings about quite different subjects from the ones we are

Browning.

accustomed to. The out-door beauties of England for the most part are nothing to him; he does not see visions or paint pictures. His interest is in human character, and his aim is to display human character in relation to circumstance. His method is the method of the dramatist—to make men reveal their souls in speech. His insight into character and his power of reconstructing moods and motives are extraordinary, but it is very difficult to illustrate these, because they need to be seen in the big-scale poems. I sometimes think that *The Ring and the Book* is the greatest intellectual achievement of the Victorian age, though how high it stands merely as poetry is a difficult question. As you know, it is the story of an Italian murder and judgment, told by each of the people chiefly concerned from his own point of view. I am sure there is no long poem in English, not excepting *Paradise Lost*, which is more worth reading *right through*. It is no good reading parts of it. Here are some scraps from the shorter poems, which illustrate

Browning's attitude to life and his power of vigorous, dramatic soliloquy. This is from *Rabbi Ben Ezra*:

*Thoughts hardly to be packed
 Into a narrow act,
 Fancies that broke through language and es-
 caped;
 All I could never be,
 All, men ignored in me,
 This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the
 pitcher shaped.*

—and this from *The Grammarian's Funeral*. His pupils speak of a dead scholar, dead in the cause of learning:

*He ventured neck or nothing—heaven's success
 Found, or earth's failure:
 'Wilt thou trust death or not?' He answered
 'Yes!
 Hence with life's pale lure!
 That low man seeks a little thing to do,
 Sees it and does it:*

*This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.*

*That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred's soon hit:*

*This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.*

*That, has the world here—should he need the
next,*

Let the world mind him!

*This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find Him.*

And here is how Browning faces death—
Prospice he calls the poem.

*Fear death?—to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,*

*When the snows begin, and the blast denote
I am nearing the place,*

*The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe;*

*Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible
form,*

*Yet the strong man must go:
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
And the barriers fall,
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
And bade me creep past.
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,*

*Shall dwindle, shall blend,
 Shall change, shall become first a peace out of
 pain,
 Then a light, then thy breast,
 O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
 And with God be the rest!*

In all this there is not that soft music of words which we have found in the other poets. Browning *can* be musical, but he generally prefers not to be. He does not soothe you with sweet melodies; he keeps you awake by throwing stones at you. Why else should he rhyme *failure* with *pale lure*? Browning hates both the limp thought and the luscious language of the Tennyson tradition. His thought is always vigorous, often subtle, occasionally profound, and his language is the very reverse of 'luscious.' It is really just natural human speech with all that is not essential left out—natural speech *compressed*, as it were. Certainly it gains in intensity from the process of compression; at any rate Browning generally

seems to write in the tone of a man speaking *eagerly*—explaining, arguing, pleading or storming—a man who unmistakably means what he says and who tries as hard as he can (though not always successfully, for Browning is difficult to follow) to say what he means.

There is no doubt that Browning's characters sometimes seem to think and feel all very much in the same way, but perhaps the truth is rather that they *speak* in the same way, for, when all is said, Browning in his dramatic poems has only one style. At any rate the similarity, whether of style or of substance, cannot be denied. Except by the metre, it would be hard to tell from what poem such lines as these are taken:

*My own hope is a sun will pierce
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched;
That after Last returns the First,
Though a wide compass round be fetched;
That what begins best, can't end worst,
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.*

You might attribute this passage to almost any character in Browning—partly because of the manner of it and partly also because of the matter of it. For optimism is of the very stuff of Browning's thought—a virile optimism, the optimism of the man who makes his own fate. Indeed there is no passage in Browning more nobly characteristic of all his work than that fine fighting poem, the *Epilogue* from *Asolando*:

*One who never turned his back, but marched
 breast forward,
 Never doubted clouds would break,
 Never dreamed, though right were worsted,
 wrong would triumph,
 Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight
 better,
 Sleep to wake.
 No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-
 time,
 Greet the unseen with a cheer!*

*Bid him forward, breast and back as either
should be,*

*‘Strive and thrive!’ cry, ‘Speed—fight on, fare
ever*

There as here!’

XI

THE POETRY OF TO-DAY

XI. THE POETRY OF TO-DAY

I AM afraid that my 'procession' must end with Browning, and yet I should like to add a single word about 'Georgian' poetry—the poetry of this new century. The quantity and the variety of it are rather overwhelming, and its most obvious characteristic, its liking

To-day. for looser and subtler metres, opens

too big a question for me to tackle now, but some of it seems to me to have a special interest apart from that, if one considers it as continuing a movement which has been going on since the death of Pope. It is a movement from the general and the abstract to the particular and the concrete, a movement which has been bringing poetry continuously closer to daily life. The fanciful Elizabethans, the fantastic Carolines, Milton aloof

and learned, Pope personal and sententious, are all in their several ways remote from *the things we work with and live with*, as a Greek poet puts it. Wordsworth begins the change. It is his greatness that he wrote of the concrete things which are the frame-work of our ordinary existence. Yet he wrote of them as we see them in exceptional moments of insight or emotion, and though Keats and Shelley wrote of them too, it was only to transmute them into something else. But Tennyson wrote of them as they are and as we see them in our ordinary moods, and he brings poetry nearer than any other writer of his century to our life of every day. Do you remember the pie?

*Where quail and pigeon, lark and leveret lay,
Like fossils of the rock, with golden yolks
Imbedded and injellied.*

Browning does the same thing in a different way, for though he does not write for the most

part of external sights and sounds, he writes of common men's emotions in the words of common speech. Perhaps his successor among the Georgians is Mr. Robert Nichols, whose dramatic monologue, *The Assault*, does indeed describe external things, but only in order to describe the better a man's emotions in battle:

*Time soon now . . . home . . . home on a
sunny hill . . .*

Gone like a flickered page:

Time soon now . . . zero . . . will engage . . .

A sudden thrill:

'Fix bayonets!'

Gods! we have our fill

Of fear, hysteria, exultation, rage,

Rage to kill.

Blindness a moment. Sick.

There the men are!

Bayonets ready: click!

Time goes quick;

A stumbled prayer . . . somehow a blazing star

In a blue night . . . where?

138 THE POETIC PROCESSION

Again prayer.

The tongue trips. Start:

How's time? Soon now. Two minutes or less.

I'm up. Go on.

Something meets us,

Head down into the storm that greets us.

A wail. Lights. Blurr. Gone.

But the successor of Tennyson's pie is the 'honey for tea' of Rupert Brooke's *Grantchester*. There is more humanity in Brooke than in Tennyson because there is more humour, and for that reason, if for no other, *Grantchester* carries Tennyson's work in this kind a long step forward. Here is the vision of *The Old Vicarage, Grantchester*, which Rupert Brooke saw in Berlin in 1912.

*And in that garden, black and white,**

Creep whispers through the grass all night;

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*And spectral dance, before the dawn,
A hundred Vicars down the lawn;
Curates, long dust, will come and go
On lissom, clerical, printless toe;
And oft between the boughs is seen
The sly shade of a Rural Dean. . . .
Ah God! to see the branches stir
Across the moon at Grantchester!
To smell the thrilling-sweet and rotten
Unforgettable, unforgotten
River-smell, and hear the breeze
Sobbing in the little trees.
Say, do the elm-clumps greatly stand
Still guardians of that holy land?
The chestnuts shade, in reverend dream,
The yet unacademic stream?
Is dawn a secret shy and cold
Anadyomene, silver-gold?
And sunset still a golden sea
From Haslingfield to Madingley?
And after, ere the night is born,
Do hares come out about the corn?*

*Oh, is the water sweet and cool,
 Gentle and brown, above the pool?
 And laughs the immortal river still
 Under the mill, under the mill?
 Say, is there Beauty yet to find?
 And Certainty? and Quiet kind?
 Deep meadows yet, for to forget
 The lies, and truths, and pains—oh! yet
 Stands the church clock at ten to three?
 And is there honey still for tea?*

Here is a poet talking just as if he did not realize he was a poet. Tennyson never did that.

And it is Rupert Brooke, too, who, in another poem, has deliberately and expressly, as it seems, consummated the process by which poetry has been brought near to daily life. *The Great Lover* is a poem written about nothing else than *the things we work with and live with*. Listen to the catalogue of the things he loved.

*These I have loved: **

*White plates and cups, clean-gleaming,
Ringed with blue lines; and feathery, faery
dust;*

*Wet roofs, beneath the lamplight; the strong
crust*

*Of friendly bread; and many-tasting food;
Rainbows; and the blue bitter smoke of wood;
And radiant raindrops couching in cool
flowers;*

*And flowers themselves, that sway through
sunny hours,*

*Dreaming of moths that drink them under the
moon;*

*Then, the cool kindliness of sheets, that soon
Smooth away trouble; and the rough male kiss
Of blankets; grainy wood; live hair that is
Shining and free; blue-massing clouds; the
keen*

Unpassioned beauty of a great machine;

* Copyright, 1918, by Dodd, Mead and Company, Inc.

*The benison of hot water; furs to touch;
The good smell of old clothes; and other such—*

But Rupert Brooke is dead—it was a very bright light, I think, that went out when he died—and I am going to end with a few lines from a living poet, that we may leave the ‘procession’ in a mood of hopefulness. Whoever has not read Mr. Masfield’s *Reynard the Fox* has no idea of what English poetry has been doing in these last twenty years. But I am going to read something much shorter. It is not quite so new but I think it is nearly as modern. It is called *Cargoes*.

*Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir,**

*Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine,
With a cargo of ivory and apes and peacocks,
Sandalwood, cedar wood, and sweet white
wine.*

* Copyright by the Macmillan Co.

*Stately Spanish galleon coming from the
Isthmus,*

*Dipping through the tropics by the palm-
green shores,*

*With a cargo of diamonds, emeralds, ame-
thysts,*

Topazes and cinnamon and gold moldores.

*Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke-
stack,*

*Butting through the Channel in the mad
March days,*

*With a cargo of Tyne coal, road-rails, pig-lead,
Fire-wood, ironware, and cheap tin trays.*

(1)

THE END

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